

Now champions face the 'crunch'

HAVING dropped four points out of a possible six in their last two outings, champions Wycombe Wanderers face "the crunch" game tonight (Tuesday) when they take on the Rothmans Isthmian League Division One leaders Leatherhead at Loakes Park writes Stuart Earp.

A good result in this match is of the utmost importance to Wanderers, who need points in the bag to catch up on the top two teams, Leatherhead and Ilford, both four points clear. Ilford, however, have played one more game. In between the Blues and the top two clubs are Enfield, who were involved in the Challenge Trophy on Saturday. They travel to Newbury Park tonight to meet Ilford, in the other top-of-the-table encounter.

After thrashing Hendon 5-0 a fortnight ago, the Blues have struggled in the last three outings. They beat Milton Keynes 2-0 in the F.A. Cup but then dropped two points in a thrilling 2-2 draw at home to Hayes and two more at Champion Hill, Dulwich on Saturday. So the

maximum three points tonight would put Wycombe right back on form while defeat would mean a lot of hard work to catch up on the leaders.

Wanderers have already met Leatherhead in the league this season, in an excellent game at Fetcham Grove. The verdict went to the 'Tanners' 2-1, but most people felt the visitors had deserved to share the honours. A glance at Leatherhead's record this season shows just why they are enjoying their best ever season in the Isthmian League.

They have finished on the losing side only twice — both away from home. They lost 1-3 at Ilford and the next game also went down at Dulwich Hamlet 1-2. Their string of victories makes impressive reading, however. At home they have beaten Dulwich 3-1, Hayes 1-0, Slough 4-0, Wycombe 2-1, Walton 3-0, Hornchurch (F.A.C.) 5-0 and Ilford 2-0. Their away record reads Oxford 4-0, Walton 5-0, Kingstonian 2-0, Hendon 2-2, Ilford 1-3, Dulwich 1-2, Kingsbury (London Senior Cup) 2-0.

Leatherhead's latest triumph came against Ilford on Saturday

when they avenged their away defeat with a 2-1 victory. The 'Tanners' were trailing to a Tony Turley goal at half time but then Pete Lavers, their top goalscorer, hit two second half goals to clinch the points. Apparently, the home side completely dominated the second half. This success put them on top of the table on goal average but with a game in hand over Ilford.

This man Lavers is in prodigious form at present. He has hit 16 goals already in league and cup games this season and must be the most dangerous striker around at the moment. He hit the first goal against Wanderers at Fetcham Grove after Keith Searle had given the Blues a 1-0 lead. Chris Kelly snatched the winner nine minutes from the end.

Leatherhead are expected to field the same side that beat Ilford on Saturday and have no injury problems. Their probable team will be: J. Swannell, P. Dade, D. Sergeant, B. Webb, D. Reid, J. Cooper, C. Woffinden, W. Smith, J. Doyle, C. Kelly, P. Lavers, sub D. Wells. Their other goalscorers this term are: Kelly 5, Webb 4 (3 pens),

Cooper 4, Doyle 3, Reid 3, Smith 2, Dade 1 and two own goals.

Wanderers skipper Alan Phillips, who returned to the side at Dulwich after a five match absence due to a leg injury and had an impressive game, is likely to continue at centre back as Dave Bullock is still troubled by an ankle injury aggravated against Hayes. There are doubts over Steve Perrin, who also has a damaged ankle.

Apart from the Hayes match, Wycombe have held the edge over their opponents in most of their recent matches but their inability to score goals has let them down badly. Leatherhead, bursting with confidence, will allow them only a limited amount of scoring opportunities and these must be accepted if Wanderers are to be successful.

The form of Keith Searle against Tanners centre back Dave Reid in the last meeting between these sides promises much for Wycombe. Keith set up several fine moves with his ability in the air and their duel tonight could be the deciding factor of the game.